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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000953

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN: CONFLICTING VIEWPOINTS ON GOVERNMENT,S
RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN THE SOUTH

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On August 18 EmbOff traveled to Kyrgyzstan,s second largest city, Osh, and met separately with religious officials from Osh State University and the State Agency on Religious Affairs. The officials presented different views on religious extremism in southern Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz government,s handling of the situation. The Osh State University representative expressed dissatisfaction with the government,s haphazard attempts at reining in religious extremists. However, the government official spoke positively of the government,s efforts and its outreach to local law enforcement and religious organizations.
END SUMMARY

12. (C) On August 18, EmbOff traveled to Osh, Kyrgyzstan,s second largest city, to meet with local contacts and discuss their views on religion and extremism in southern Kyrgyzstan. Unlike the capital, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan,s South represents a more active base of religious activity. The Kyrgyz border area between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is porous allowing Islamic extremists to travel to and from Afghanistan and Pakistan through Central Asia.

THE ACADEMIC VIEWPOINT

13. (C) Timur Kozukulov, a professor in the Theology Department at Osh State University, was largely critical of the Kyrgyz government,s inability to comprehend and solve the religious extremism problem in southern Kyrgyzstan. Kozukulov noted that while the government treated the situation as a law enforcement issue, the State Committee for National Security (GKNB), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), and local police were not well equipped to understand the problem and properly control it. Kozukulov readily acknowledged that a problem with religious extremism existed and suggested the government do more to address the fundamental causes behind the alarming trend: lack of employment opportunities and a poor educational system.

14. (C) On the subject of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), Kozukulov agreed with the government,s assessment of HT as a terrorist group, however, he was unsure of associations between HT and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) or the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). Kozukulov observed that HT displayed a

different profile to the West, and therefore the U.S. and others viewed HT not as a terrorist organization but as a religious movement. Switching topics somewhat, Kozukulov denied that madrassas were being used by HT or other extremist groups to foment Islamic fundamentalism. Instead, he portrayed the schools simply as sources of religious education with no underlying motivation to convert their young students into extremists.

THE OFFICIAL VIEWPOINT

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting, Kanybek Mamataliev, a senior expert with the State Agency on Religious Affairs (SARA), provided a different view, suggesting to EmbOff that the government had the Islamic extremist problem under control. Mamataliev discussed several actions that had been taken in recent years to combat the problem, including the development of new criminal laws, the formation of SARA as a coordinating organ between law enforcement and other government organs, and a concerted effort to educate individuals on all levels on the nature of the problem and the means to deal with it. On this last point, Mamataliev said that the recent series of conferences by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), seminars for local police departments, and the establishment of a religious hotline were positive steps. Mamataliev stressed the need to carefully observe human rights when dealing with this issue, and spoke of additional measures to educate law enforcement personnel on religious freedoms.

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¶6. (C) Mamataliev acknowledged that one of his primary concerns was the relatively large number of Kyrgyz citizens traveling to Pakistan for religious educational training. Mamataliev noted that the current fighting in Pakistan and Afghanistan had only made the situation worse. In addition, the resulting instability along the border areas had allowed an increasing number of Kyrgyz citizens to travel into this region illegally via Tajikistan.

¶7. (C) Mamataliev said that he was working with religious officials to better understand this problem, as well as the general trend amongst the younger population in the South today to lead a more devout life. Transitioning to the issue of madrassas, Mamataliev was very clear that the government's goal was not to control but to regulate these religious schools to ensure that the education provided to their students better prepared them to find non-religious employment.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The reality of the growing extremism in southern Kyrgyzstan likely falls somewhere in the middle of the scenarios described by the Embassy's contacts. While the SARA official clearly articulated a series of efforts being taken by the government, it is difficult to believe that the Kyrgyz government is fully aware of the scope of the problem. While Mamataliev's stated focus on human rights and religious freedoms is noteworthy, in our experience, Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement organs are not always receptive to these principles.
GFOELLER